



ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD RECOMMENDATION 20131006 005a

Date: October 16, 2013

Subject: Briefing and request for recommendation on the Austin Urban Forest Plan

Motioned By: Robert Deegan

Seconded By: Marisa Perales

Rationale:

Whereas the Urban Forest is a key priority of the Imagine Austin Plan and a critical resource to the health of our community, and

Whereas the City of Austin staff and the Urban Forestry Board have worked with the community to develop an Urban Forestry Plan that seeks to protect and improve this critical resource, and

Whereas, the plan could still be improved through additional input that has been provided, increased clarity of priorities and responsibilities, a more detailed review process for Department Operational Plans and Standards of Care, and a clear path to a broader urban forestry plan that encompasses both public and privately held land.

Therefore, the Environmental Board commends outstanding efforts thus far expended and recommends that the Urban Forestry Board further develop the plan per recommendations detailed in attached memo before bringing revised plan back to the Environmental Board for recommendation and City Council for Approval.

Vote 6-0-0-1

For: Deegan, Gary, Maxwell, Perales, Schissler and Walker

Against: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Mary Ann Neely

Approved By:

Dr. Mary Gay Maxwell, Chair

Attachment:

AUSTIN URBAN FOREST PLAN
Development Committee Suggestions
October 16, 2013

We want to express our appreciation for the hard work that has gone into the development of the Austin Urban Forest Plan by PARD staff and Urban Forestry Board members. After meeting with members of the Urban Forestry Board, citizen stakeholders, and staff, the Development Committee of the Environmental Board has the following suggestions to assist in finalizing the Plan before it is sent to City Council.

First, the focus of the Plan has been defined to be the publicly owned parklands of the City of Austin. Our comments regarding that are as follows:

- Our preference is for the Plan to clearly state in the title that it is a Plan that includes the part of the urban forest that is on public parkland and publicly owned lands of the City of Austin. This Plan is not for the entire urban forest of Austin.
- Since this plan is not written to address the entire urban forest, then, it should at least include a strategy/proposal for getting the process started to develop a “comprehensive” urban forest plan.
- The document on page 8 refers to the need for a comprehensive plan, and the Committee agrees with that statement. A comprehensive Plan for the entire urban forest of Austin is a serious need given that the drought has impacted that forest greatly and that increasing development of the city is also impacting it.
- The Environmental Board can recommend to City Council that there be a comprehensive plan as a subsequent action to adoption of the current Plan by the City Council. A more comprehensive plan would involve active participation by the City Arborist and others involved in the management of the entire urban forest of Austin.

Second, regarding the text of the draft Plan, our suggestions are as follows:

- We acknowledge the benefit in having a broad plan with general language that everyone can agree with, as long as it is concise and clear as to the vision, goals and objectives of the Plan.

- In addition, there is a need for good, clear direction in place regarding maintenance for staff to adhere to. The plan should serve as a blueprint for city staff & departments and include specific language that directs staff & others on how to protect and maintain the urban forest. The changes suggested by Dr. Tom Hayes, Peggy Maceo, Zoila Vega and Robert Deegan seem well thought out, reasonable, and useful and should be incorporated into the plan. In particular, language related to: data collection, proactive and reactive tree maintenance as a priority, need for watering (with special attention during drought periods), protection of root zones, and strict adherence with the Heritage Tree Ordinance should be incorporated into the plan.
- Adjust or clarify the Departmental Operational Plan Review process to require Departments to address applicable public comments documented in the Plan's Appendices to ensure that public comments gathered at the multiple engagement events help inform operational plans.
- It should be acknowledged clearly in the Plan that there is a lack of essential data & make collection of data a priority of the Plan. This is an essential and urgent first step. In our judgment, it is imperative that data collection begin with the implementation of the Plan, and that the Plan then be re-visited soon after data collection is complete.
- A review of the Plan implementation should occur much sooner than is indicated in the current draft. The input of the stakeholders and some Board members is very clear about the recommended time frame for review. This is quite urgent because of the drought impacts on the many trees in the Urban Forest of Austin.